In Spies We Trust - Or Do We?

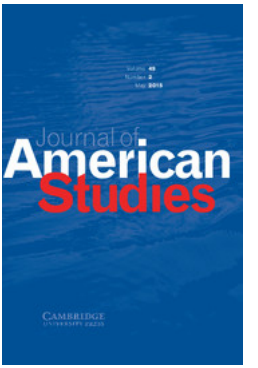
Hillebrand, Claudia Katrin

Published in:
Journal of American Studies

DOI:
10.1017/S0021875815000614

Publication date:
2015

Citation for published version (APA):
Hillebrand, C. K. (2015). In Spies We Trust - Or Do We? *Journal of American Studies*, *49*(2), [E43]. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875815000614



Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *In Spies We Trust: The Story of Western Intelligence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, £20.00). Pp. 312.isbn 978 0 1995 8097 2.

CLAUDIA HILLEBRAND

Journal of American Studies / Volume 49 / Issue 02 / May 2015 / E43
DOI: 10.1017/S0021875815000614, Published online: 18 May 2015

Journal of American Studies, **49** (2015), e43. doi:10.1017/S0021875815000614

Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *In Spies We Trust: The Story of Western Intelligence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, £20.00). Pp. 312. ISBN 978 0 1995 8097 2.

Trust is at the heart of the intelligence business. Given that most intelligence activities are conducted in secret, the people have to trust intelligence services to perform well and to work for the wider public good. Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones suggests in the conclusion of his new book that, in the twentieth century, secret intelligence "acquired the reputation of being not just a means of winning wars, but a means also of preventing them" (230). Yet trust is a fragile thing, as demonstrated by the ongoing debates following whistleblower Edward Snowden's revelations about the extensive use of mass surveillance tools by the NSA and GCHQ. Jeffreys-Jones's book ponders the important question: why did we ever start trusting spies?

In *In Spies We Trust: The Story of Western Intelligence*, the author provides an insightful history of the Anglo-American intelligence relationship. Describing the beginning of this eventually close liaison as a "coincidence" (10), the author continues to explore major aspects of the relationship. He argues that the bond has changed considerably over time, from the United States being a close partner to Britain to being merely "a more distant cousin" in the aftermath of the decision to invade Iraq in 2003. In the final section of the book, the focus is on the search for alternative – i.e. non-American – partners for British intelligence, focussing on Europol and European intelligence more broadly.

This history of Anglo-American intelligence is embedded in a wider cultural and sociopolitical analysis. For example, pondering the example of U-1, the intelligence unit of the US Department of State until its abolition in 1927, the author reflects on the Anglophilia of America's elite, and a general elitist mindset, at the time, and explores issues of distrust towards other countries. A desire to "knock the French" is emphasized as a feature of the embryonic Anglo-American relationship. While intimate historical moments are well described, for example the unfolding of "the first Anglo-American covert operation of the Cold War" (96) with the aim to overthrow the Stalinist Hoxha regime in Albania, there are also a number of curiously sweeping statements in the book. Considering the first years after the end of the Second World War and the creation of the CIA, for example, it is argued that "[t]he decisive element in the CIA's worldwide intelligence ascendancy was its democratic provenance and oversight" (107). Certainly at the time, the CIA was more visible than the British Secret Intelligence Service and was put on a proper legislative footing from the beginning. Yet the period between the CIA's creation in 1947 and the formation in the mid-1970s of the Pike and Church Committees with the aim of investigating alleged wrongdoings by the CIA and other intelligence agencies is widely seen as a period of non-oversight of the CIA. Congress did not show any political willingness to scrutinize the intelligence realm.

The subtitle of the book is puzzling. This is not "The Story of Western Intelligence" but a study of the Anglo-American intelligence relationship. Consequently, for major parts of the book, countries other than the UK or the US are considered only in the context of exploring dimensions and features of the Anglo-American relationship. Only chapters 10 and 11 explicitly consider other European intelligence efforts.

Exploring the transatlantic liaison arrangements, the book draws largely on the rich existing academic literature on the subject and compiles the material in a concise manner. The interview material seems primarily to concern the EU-related aspects of the book.

Although the question of why Anglo-American intelligence established credibility in the previous century is at the heart of this book, it has surprisingly little to say about the question of why we *should* trust spies. The record of the liaison's efficacy and effectiveness has been patchy, as is clearly demonstrated in the book. Given the title of the book, it would have been useful to explore in some depth public expectations and willingness to trust their intelligence providers.

To conclude, this is a valuable addition to Jeffreys-Jones's admirable work on American intelligence. The book is an illuminating and concise evaluation of the relationship between American and British intelligence services from infancy to today. It will be useful to students of, and to those generally interested in, intelligence, foreign policy and security studies.

Aberystwyth University CLAUDIA HILLEBRAND